

SA 69+70  
My name is Lei-Anna Bertelsen. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on this bill. I am a full time mother of three- a fourth grader, a kindergartner, and a four year old who will begin school next fall. I have a part time business tutoring kids after school, and I am very involved with volunteer work in the Bozeman community where I live. Let me just say that this is the first time I have taken part in this process and I hope you can empathize that it feels a bit intimidating to expose my beliefs in front of an audience. But education is that important, not just to me, but to all of us, so I'm willing to sacrifice my comfort zone in the hope you will agree and support both SB 69 and 70.

The economic reality is that there is less money for all the things we want to support. We know this, and in Bozeman have begun conversations with how to deal with that shortfall. Both of these bills will merely soften the blow to making difficult choices of what to cut from our schools, and the only thing to really cut from our schools is staff. Our classrooms are already at capacity or overcrowded. Any reduction of staff has significant impacts.

My son is in a K-1 class <sup>with</sup> ~~had~~ more than 20 students. For a time, there was an overflow aide, but then this veteran teacher gave up her aide time to a first year kindergarten teacher who needed it more. Luckily, I was able to find parents and family members who could volunteer in Cedar's classroom each day of the week. My daughter's 4<sup>th</sup> grade class is at the maximum number of 28 and the resource teacher is instrumental in collaborating with the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher to meet the variety of needs in that class. She also has very dedicated parents. On different days of the week, we each work with an advanced group of students in reading, language, and math. This is just one school and two classrooms. I wonder about the schools and classrooms that do not have parent volunteers, who rely exclusively on their resource and staff numbers. If you have ever coached a sports team, been in charge of an activity of a group of kids, supervised a party or sleepover of 9 year olds, or just spent time with a group of 8 or more children, you know what it means to have one extra adult to help you. *This is the picture for this year. Next year there will be even less.*

Imagine going into surgery. You have an anesthesiologist, nurses, technicians, all ready to assist the doctor during the procedure. What would be the difference if the doctor, were to perform the operation alone, without any professional assistance? After all, she is the most highly qualified, one essential person needed to do surgery, shouldn't she be able to do it <sup>alone</sup> by herself? Would you want to be the patient in this case? This may bring up the question about the value we place on the quality we expect from doctors and our healthcare system compared to the quality we expect from our teachers and our educational system. And I strongly believe they are equally important.

SB 69 and 70 asks you to fund all parts of the budget and increase the quality educator payment as a more stable source of funding than the per-student amount. As stated before, the schools are prepared to make budget cuts, but these bills will ease some of the painful decisions they are facing. You have an important and tough job ahead of you, and not just with this issue. But I ask you to consider that the vibrancy of our communities depends upon the quality of education we offer our kids. Our future depends on it. Thank you.

Dear Chairman Liable and members of the Committee:

I am here as a parent and concerned citizen to support SB 69 and SB 70. Thank you for your service to our state and for your time.

I have two children: a son in middle school and a daughter in high school. My kids are bright and high achieving. The programs they need to continue to achieve on the highest academic level are often the very ones threatened or cut by shortfalls. It is disheartening to see budget deficits year after year in our school district; budget restrictions that directly affect the district's ability to meet my children's needs in math and science because there often is not enough staff or resources to offer advanced sections.

I have one big idea on how to trim waste and cut expenses.....stop making it necessary to cut the budget - know that we are down to the bare bones now and this minimum must, at least, be maintained; make sure education gets the same percentage of the state budget as all other agencies. The biggest waste I see are the hours and hours of time our administrators and teachers spend trying to figure out how to cover the budget shortfall each year. I would love to see an accounting of the amount of time spent strategizing - always resulting in cuts to programs, staff and materials. It is time that these skilled and dedicated people be empowered to put their efforts towards BUILDING programs and deepening and broadening our student's knowledge, instead of constantly shrinking programs, cutting corners and lowering expectations because of funding shortages.

Please show your support for our future by giving public education the very highest funding you are able to this year and work to guarantee public education equity in funding with all other state agencies. This year, to maintain status quo, we should be at a 5% increase. Please SUPPORT education, RESPECT our children and teachers, and INVEST in the future of our state and country.....build educational infrastructure now.....it is our highest priority. Please vote for SB 69 and 70. They do not provide the increase in State Aid that the schools need to maintain status quo but they do take a positive step in that direction.

Thank you for your time.

Jennifer Douglas  
2320 Arnica Dr.  
Bozeman, MT 59715

406-582-8053  
JenWDouglas@gmail.com

Chairman Laible and members of the committee,

My name is Sarah Bothner & I am a parent of 2 children (a 5 year old & a 2 year old). I live in Bozeman & I am writing to support both SB 69 & SB 70.

I am concerned. I am concerned about the future of public education in Montana not only for my children, but also for all children in Montana. I keep hearing more & more about:

- The rising number of students in class rooms...
- The AP, language, art & athletic programs being cut...
- The low salaries offered to the well trained & educated people we are entrusting to educate our children, the future leaders in our communities, our state.

At this rate, what will our schools be like in 10 years when my daughter is in 9<sup>th</sup> grade & my son is in 7<sup>th</sup>? I am concerned. Will they have access to the "quality education" that children receive today? What is "quality education?" To me, there are a few components required for education to be considered quality:

1. There is an environment where each student's potential to be able & creative can develop.
2. There is an environment oriented towards the development of each child's inherent possibilities.
3. At a minimum, it must come from an accredited school, meaning a school that is recognized as maintaining specific standards requisite for its graduates to gain admission to other reputable institutions of higher learning.

Is a kindergarten classroom with 26 children & with one teacher this type of environment? What if the number of students rises so much (due to inadequate funding for teachers) that the schools in our state are no longer meeting accreditation standards / are not accredited? Will our children be able to get into college coming from a non-accredited school? What if a child happens to excel in a subject matter & we have no advanced placement courses to offer. We are now denying this child an environment where her/his individual potential can develop.

How can our schools provide an environment oriented towards the development of each child's inherent possibilities without any art, language, AP, & athletic programs? These are the things that add enrichment to education. We all know that there is more to learning than the "3 R's."

How will we be able to address the needs of at risk & special needs kids if all of these "extra" programs are cut due to inadequate funding?

And, What about the teachers we need on board to provide "quality education", why should these folks choose to stay in / come to Montana if we can not offer salaries that are competitive? Keep in mind that most people finish college with a large financial debt to pay.

WE need to continue to be RESPONSIBLE for creating opportunities for "quality education" in our state, & we need to start now. Perhaps my biggest concern is that when programs have to be cut due to budget limitations now, it will be very difficult if not impossible to add them back in the future.

SB 69 & SB 70 will offer a way to make "opportunities" for the continued promotion of "quality education" in Montana. These bills will decrease the amount of budget shortfall and thus decrease the number of teachers cut, directly impacting classroom size in a positive way. From where I am standing, there is only one option. Please support these 2 OPI bills and make a large step forward for the future of Montana by continuing to promote "quality education" for our next generation & beyond.

Sarah Bothner  
125 Cook Ct  
Bozeman, Montana 59715  
406.586.4393  
bothner@bresnan.net

Testimonial  
February 4, 2009  
Edwin T. Churchill  
Bozeman, MT  
406-388-6137  
406-570-8062  
etc1415@yahoo.com

Montana State Senators and Representatives:

"The budget should be balanced; the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest Rome become bankrupt. People must again learn to work, instead of living on public assistance."

Cicero - 55 BC

Based on the above statement and our current nationwide economic situation, one would ask **"What have we learned in two thousand years."**

Today, you will hear from many citizens of Montana representing diverse areas of the state all urging you to increase the funding for our schools. Unfortunately, in line with the above statement and our constitution, you are also required to pass a balanced budget. Even as Montanans should be eternally grateful for that constitutional requirement, they still have the right to request you prioritize the spending in their best interest.

I am not here today to ask you to increase the overall budget as I do feel that a balanced budget even without a legal requirement is in the best interest of Montanans. Instead, I am here to ask you to think of the ways you can spend to further insure the future well being of our state. As you vote on each of the areas of the budget, I would ask that you think of our children and grandchildren's future. Only your vote has the power to significantly affect our state's legacy.

During the last few months, I have observed some disturbing trends in not only our country, but also right here in Montana. As an example:

In Bozeman during the last election, we passed a Jail bond to build a new jail to house prisoners in a **non-crowded** cell. This bond was for approximately \$35M. Today, we are talking about a Bozeman school district shortfall of \$1.5M which if not resolved by additional funding will result in **over crowding** of the classrooms.

Maybe, I am just old fashion, but I would always put "KIDS" first.

While the example above is not a legislative issue, it does highlight how we seem to think about prioritizing our spending. In conclusion, I only ask that when you draft the final budget that you seriously consider which budget line truly makes our state "The Last Best Place".

January 27, 2009

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter today. I realize how busy your schedule is and how important your job is to all of us in the state of Montana. In light of this, I will keep my letter brief. I am writing to express my support of SB 69 and SB 70. With the passage of SB 69 and SB 70 our district will be facing a budget shortfall of approximately \$800,000. Without these bills we will be short \$1.7 million. It is critical to pass these bills to minimize the budget shortfall.

I currently have two children in Bozeman's Emily Dickinson elementary school, one in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, one in Kindergarten. My son, the kindergartner, is one of many children at the school who has need of extra help in the classroom. He is taken from his classroom to perform work through the Title I program. He has shown great improvement with this personalized attention and is now taking pride in learning his letters and the sounds that accompany them. He was not doing this within the regular classroom setting or with the help we were providing at home. He needed the individualized attention that the reading intervention specialist has been able to provide. Without the Title I program, my son would most likely be failing, not because he's not smart enough, but because our school was not able to give him and other students like him the extra attention they need to succeed. Programs such as reading intervention are critical to the success of our students and our schools. This is only one of many programs that could face cuts under a budget shortfall such as we are facing.

We currently have 46 classrooms that are overloaded (above OPI standards for accreditation) and we face many more being over accreditation standards next year with the budget shortfall. Teachers with too many students will not thrive and as a result our students will receive less and less of the attention they need and deserve.

I understand that the economic crisis makes it tough to balance the needs of our state. I am asking that you help to protect what is most important in our budget by basing your budgeting decisions on what is most necessary, not simply what is the largest and easiest to cut. There is no greater asset to our state than our children's education, the key to future success for all of us.

Education needs to have a top priority in our state's budget. A strong school system is at the very core of our community; it is the key to our future, both socially and economically. Again, thank you for taking the time to read and consider my letter. I wish I could attend the hearing on these bills to testify in person, but I cannot so I sincerely appreciate your taking the time to read my written testimony today.

Sincerely,

Aloha Williams  
Bozeman  
markandaloha@imt.net

I am a mom of two kids in Montana Schools. Jimmy is 9 years old and in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and Jacob is 7 years old and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. They both attend Emily Dickinson School in Bozeman and are succeeding in school. Jacob is a normal, highly active boy that is doing great. Jimmy, my 9 year old, has Asperger's Syndrome along with some anger management issues. Asperger's Syndrome is a part of the Autism Spectrum at the high end. He is intelligent and does well with most educational things, but has a hard time writing and getting along with his peers. Currently, his writing is worse than his 2<sup>nd</sup> grade brothers. He has an IEP and a behavioral plan implemented and the school staff has been great. He meets with a resource aid to help him develop his writing and with the school psychologist to help develop his social skills.

Without the passing of these two bills – SB69 & SB70, I am afraid that Jimmy will be lost in the crowd. He isn't handicapped to a point of being unable to exist in a regular classroom, but without help, he will not do well in the coming years. If he loses his resource aid, or help from the school psychologist, he will not thrive and grow to his full potential. The help of these resources actually helps the entire student body because it frees up the teacher from spending extra time with Jimmy.

One of the reasons we moved to Montana over 4 years ago was for the quality of the education.

Our school district has 46 classrooms that exceed state standards for size! This means less time for each student. This is not the quality education that is necessary for our kids. The Bozeman elementary district is projected to add students next year, and if we lose income in addition to gaining students, all of our children will suffer.

I believe that children are our future. I also believe that there are many good and valuable programs that need support. Our kids should be given the highest priority when allocating funds from the State's general fund. A quality education is the best thing we can give our children. It is critical that we don't shortchange our kids – but fully support their education. The Governor's proposed budget will fall way short of doing that. Please pass SB69 & SB70. Thank you for your attention.

Cheryl Hampton

Bozeman

Email: [c\\_j\\_hampton@yahoo.com](mailto:c_j_hampton@yahoo.com)

Carson Taylor  
8 West Harrison Street  
Bozeman, MT 59715

February 3, 2009

To The Senate Education Committee:

Please receive this letter as support for SB 69 and SB 70. If there has ever been a time to invest in our public education system, it is now. As the State of Montana and the entire United States face a severe recession, we need to support the one thing that has the long term potential to create a stable and growing economy in our State. We have short-changed education in our State for far too long. In the name of keeping taxes low, we have allowed other countries to surpass our education system, and, unless we change, our children will be less capable of competing in the inevitable global economy. The recession of the present will become the economic norm, rather than a temporary difficulty.

I recognize that the current economic downturn presents many challenges, but our priority should be public education, and SB 69 and SB 70, although limited, are a start in the right direction. In order for the budget to balance without major cuts in the Bozeman School District in the next biennium, we will need passage of SB 69 and SB 70, and we will need to take other measures. Please do your part, we in Bozeman will do ours.

Sincerely,

Carson Taylor



Chairman Liable and members of the committee, thank you for providing the opportunity to offer testimony with regard to SB 69 and SB 70. I am a concerned parent with two children in the Bozeman Elementary School District.

I offer this testimony in support of SB 69 and SB 70 because they offer the best chance for our schools to provide an adequate educational opportunity for Montana's elementary and high school students over the next biennium. I encourage you to support these to bills, but I also challenge you to make educating our youngsters your highest priority and find additional funds to reduce the shortfalls still inherent in SB 69 and 70. Just as school districts across the state are being forced to prioritize their needs and make cuts to programs, I encourage you to do the same. Instead of making across the board cuts or cutting budgets that are largest, prioritize state programs and make cuts accordingly.

As you consider the priority to place on education, consider that budget deficits will likely lead to increased class sizes and reductions in program offerings. These changes do have measured impacts on student performance:

1.) Evidence from studies designed to measure the effects of classroom size show a positive correlation between smaller classes and improved performance, particularly in grades kindergarten through third. (Reducing Class Size: What Do We Know? Pritchard, 1999)

2.) A survey of educational literature shows that researchers who are not convinced that smaller class sizes lead to improved performance will still concede that smaller classes can contribute to more individualized instruction, higher teacher morale, and more opportunities for teachers to implement innovative instructional programs. (Picus, Resource Allocation: Class Size Reduction: Effects and Relative Costs, 2000)

3.) In its report "College Readiness: Test Data Summaries, Overview: Class 2008," Montana's Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education notes that students who completed core course curriculum (4 years English, at least 3 years math and science, and 3 years social science) scored up to 13% higher on college entrance exams than those without full core preparation.

While specific results may be debated, the studies clearly indicate that students who have fewer opportunities to learn face significant challenges to learning.

As you make your budgeting decisions, I also hope you will keep in mind that funding deficits that cause a child to fall behind early on will also cause that child to face an uphill fight for the rest of his academic and post-academic life. A recent study out of Northwestern University (Duncan, 2007) has shown that a quality early education is the most important predictor of future success.

As a kid from Tennessee, who was given great educational opportunities, I feel indebted to my kids to provide the same. My wife and I chose to live in Bozeman because of (among other things) the quality educational opportunity provided here. If Montana can

not show a commitment to its next generation and to education, I will most certainly not allow my children to suffer the consequences of the state's decision.

Please remember that our kids are the future of Montana. They will be the income earners, the legislators, the business executives, and the community leaders. It is our job to prepare them for these roles.

Thank you for your time and attention

Drew Seessel

Bozeman

[drew@seesselinvestments.com](mailto:drew@seesselinvestments.com)

February 4, 2009

Dear Senator Laible and Education Committee Members,

Thank you for your time today. With the current state of our economy it is an especially challenging time. We all appreciate your commitment to the future of our children and our state through your efforts on the education committee.

As the parent of two children in the Bozeman Elementary School system I am here to ask for your support of Senate Bills 69 and 70. These two bills are needed if we are to try and maintain the quality of education in our public schools.

I spend a lot of time in the classrooms and the school. We have amazing teachers and administrators who are very dedicated to the success of their students. They do all they can with the resources they have available to them, and that means running a very lean ship. In Bozeman we have forty six classrooms that are already over state caps, and any further reduction in budgets would result in a loss of more staff and additional increases in class sizes. If this happens the quality of education would be greatly diminished.

Teachers can only teach effectively to a certain number of students. That is why we have state caps. When we exceed those numbers some group of students gets neglected. The children who need a little extra help with reading or math may not get it and fall further behind. As they fall behind they begin to feel they are not smart enough and turn away from school. I see this in a young boy in my daughter's third grade class who would hit himself in the head, or hit his desk every time he got a math problem wrong. He felt he was stupid, and he isn't. He has received some extra tutoring, is making progress in math and his self esteem is improving.

Also the gifted and talented children won't be challenged (which can create behavioral problems), and the average children may not get the daily focus they need for continued progress.

When it comes to reading and math I have often heard the old phrase 'it all evens out by the time they are in second grade'. It's been proven that it doesn't all 'even out'. Children don't all learn the same way or at the same rate. If they don't get the attention they need at an early age they continue to struggle. That attention is usually from a teacher, resource room teacher, speech pathologist or aide. If we reduce these positions we reduce the chance of success for all students.

The world is not the same place it was when we were children. There are much higher expectations placed on our children academically and socially. Competition for entrance into colleges and universities is fierce, and applicants

not only need excellent grades in English, math and the sciences, but they must have a strong base in foreign language, the arts and community service. Should we expect that all of our children will attend college? No, but the children of Montana deserve an education that will prepare them to follow their dreams- whether that takes them to MSU, Stanford, or the running the family ranch. Please help give them that opportunity.

Danielle Freeburg  
390 Hayrake Lane  
Bozeman, MT 59715

Feb. 4, 2009

Chairman Laible and Distinguished Members of the Committee -

My name is Michael Hayes. As a public school advocate, a small business owner, and the parent of two 2<sup>nd</sup> graders in the Bozeman School District, I appreciate the opportunity to stand before you today in support of Senate Bills 69 and 70.

I support these bills because I favor maximum investment in our most promising and precious assets - our children. I hold this view not just as an interested parent, but also as a fiscal conservative and devout capitalist. I also hold this view whether in good times or bad. Quite simply, I am convinced that, when all the myriad benefits are weighed against the costs, public education is without a doubt the very best investment of the people's funds that can be made.

At the root of this outlook is the simple, inarguable fact that from cradle to grave, a well-educated child is much more apt to be an asset to his community than a liability. As a society, we can either pay a little up front to develop a productive (read: tax-paying) citizen or pay a bunch more down the road to support an unproductive one. Taken with a longer-term perspective, it's a no-brainer: rather than minimizing we should always strive to maximize education funding.

Now, no one disputes the fact that times are tough and state revenue streams are running weaker than we've been accustomed to. I recognize that, as the largest single expenditure in the state budget, school funding is bound to suffer a hit of some degree. So at this point it becomes a matter of priority.

It is precisely in uncertain economic times like these that every institution ranging from the family household all the way to the state government must take stock of its spending priorities. Firm discipline and economic reality dictate that they focus their investments on only those that return the most value, while cutting those whose returns fail to measure up. It's not the size of the expenditure, it's the return on the investment that matters.

In closing, I would submit that, as the highest priority usage of public funds available, the state's public school budget merits the smallest cut possible. SB 69 and 70 appear to offer the smallest hit being considered and therefore deserve your vigorous support.

Thank you for your consideration.

Michael E. Hayes  
608 Cambridge Drive  
Bozeman, MT 59715

SB69 and SB70 Testimony  
From Jennifer McGhay, Bozeman, Montana

First I want to thank you for your time today. I know that you have difficult decisions to make in the near future and your willingness to consider funding for K-12 education is very much appreciated.

My message is one that represents two different points of view.

First, I am a parent of a 7 year old who recently moved to Bozeman, Montana from out of state. My husband and I had a number of options as to where we could relocate our family and we chose Montana primarily due the educational opportunities that would be afforded to our son. Before deciding to come to Montana, I investigated our options (which included 10 Northwestern states) thoroughly. When visiting Montana schools we found children who are well rounded, children who exude confidence and children who are high achieving (per test data). I attribute this to the outstanding teachers and support staff, great extra and co-curricular activities and strong community support. I am here as a parent asking you to allow this to continue by supporting SB69 and SB70. These bills will allow school districts to continue the efforts mentioned above.

I also come before you as a former (out-of-state) elementary school principal and teacher who has seen/experienced first hand the devastating effects that continuous shortfalls of funding can have on individual students, families, school districts and communities. Personally, I am shocked at how well the Bozeman School District has done given they have had funding shortfalls in 14 of the last 18 years. Those shortfalls have already caused the loss of great teachers and support staff, but moral is still high and academic programs are strong. This can only be attributed to the outstanding leadership and teamwork of the district's employees. But, please heed my warning, as I have seen on-going cuts force great leaders to have to make the decision to cut all extra-curricular activities, push class sizes up to unreasonable levels and cut desperately needed classroom and resource teachers along with much needed support staff. With the current shortfall looming over us, our leaders are going to be forced to make those same decisions. It is my experience that people make the difference in the quality of education, and I also know that a large majority of the General Fund is dedicated to people. Therefore, shortfalls of needed funds equal the loss of people. And when we lose people we diminish the quality of a child's education, which in turn lessens the quality of life for all those connected to children in Montana.

I conclude by saying, if you are one supporting SB69 & SB70 & K-12 funding, I offer you a heart-felt thank you. If you are one who does not support these bills I beg you to reconsider the effect that your decisions will have on not only the children of Montana but also the future of the communities in which they live. I am most certain that the legislators in my previous state who supported funding shortfalls year after year did not realize the traumatic affects of their choices at the time they made them. But those same legislators are now scrambling to allow school districts to buy paper and pencils, to make good on negotiated teacher contracts and ultimately to keep schools open. Although we are not at that point yet, I fear we are on that path. Please don't let Montana get to this point. Please choose to make education a top priority in Montana. Please fund SB69 & SB70.

Thank you for your time.